



## Project ALERT

Project ALERT is a drug prevention curriculum for middle school students 11 to 14 years old, which dramatically reduces both the onset of substance abuse and their regular use. The 2-year, 14-lesson program focuses on the substances that adolescents are most likely to use: alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and inhalants. Project ALERT uses participatory activities and videos to help:

- Motivate adolescents against drug use
- Teach adolescents the skills and strategies needed to resist prodrug pressures
- Establish nondrug-using norms

Guided classroom discussions and small group activities stimulate peer interaction and challenge student beliefs and perceptions, while intensive role-playing activities help students learn and master resistance skills. Homework assignments that also involve parents extend the learning process by facilitating parent-child discussions of drugs and how to resist using them. These lessons are reinforced through videos that model appropriate behavior.

## TARGET POPULATION

Project ALERT is highly effective with adolescents, 11 to 14 years old, from widely diverse backgrounds and communities. The program has proved successful with high- and low-risk White, African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and Native American youth from urban, rural, and suburban communities and a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The original program was tested in schools in different geographic areas with different population densities, and among students with a range of racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds.



*Effective Substance Abuse and  
Mental Health Programs  
for Every Community*

## Proven Results\*

Students receiving Project ALERT:

- Reduced initiation of marijuana use by 30%
- Decreased current marijuana use by 60%
- Reduced past-month cigarette use by 20% to 25%
- Decreased regular and heavy smoking by 33% to 55%
- Substantially reduced students' prodrug attitudes and beliefs

*\*Compared with control groups.*

## INTERVENTION

Universal

Selective

Indicated



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

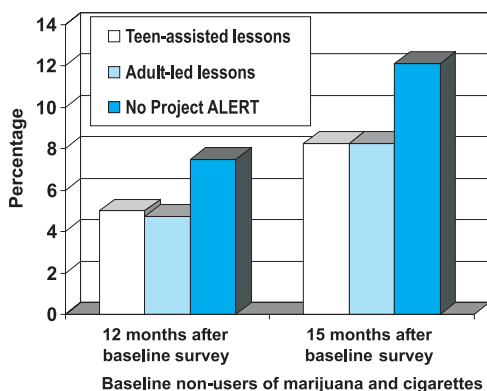
## OUTCOMES

Project ALERT was effective in schools with both large and small minority populations from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, with youth experimenting with drugs and at risk for becoming regular users, as well as those who had not tried drugs before the program began. It substantially decreased pro-drug attitudes and beliefs, including intentions to use drugs, beliefs that drug use is not harmful, and perceptions that many peers use drugs. It also increased beliefs that one can successfully resist both internal and external pressures to use drugs. The program markedly reduced the use of marijuana and cigarettes and the initiation of marijuana use.

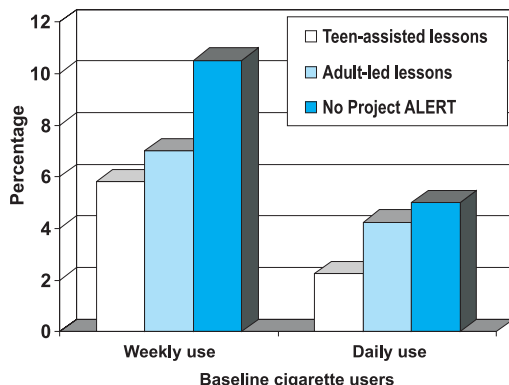
With this program, 15 months after baseline, relative to controls:

- Marijuana initiation rates were 30% lower for ALERT students
- Current marijuana use was 60% lower in adult-led programs
- Current and occasional cigarette use was 20% to 25% lower among baseline experimenters
- Regular and heavy cigarette use was one-third to 55% lower among baseline experimenters
- Antidrug beliefs were significantly enhanced, with many effects persisting into 10th grade

**Students who start to use marijuana**



**Students using cigarettes  
15 months after baseline survey**



## BENEFITS

Project ALERT helps adolescents—

- Understand the consequences of using drugs
- Develop reasons not to use
- Understand the benefits of being drug free
- Recognize that most people do not use drugs
- Identify and counter prodrug pressures
- Resist advertising appeals
- Support others in their decisions not to use
- Learn how to quit
- Communicate with parents
- Recognize alternatives to substance use

## HOW IT WORKS

Trained teachers typically deliver Project ALERT in a classroom setting, but some districts have adapted it for use in after-school settings where trained personnel are available.

Implementing Project ALERT involves staff in the following activities:

- Participating in a 1-day training workshop
- Teaching 11 core lessons during the first year and 3 booster lessons the following year
- Promoting parent involvement through home learning opportunities

To deliver lessons effectively, teachers need to establish an open, supportive classroom environment, facilitate student participation, reinforce good performance, help students acquire the confidence that they really can resist prodrug pressures, and respond appropriately to student questions about drugs.

## IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

Project ALERT lessons should be taught 1 week apart over the course of 11 weeks for Year 1 and over 3 weeks for Year 2.

Teachers need to participate in a 1-day training workshop where they learn the rationale and theory underlying Project ALERT, the skills needed to deliver the lessons, and implementation guidelines for achieving program fidelity. The location and dates of upcoming training workshops are listed on the program's Web site, [www.projectalert.best.org](http://www.projectalert.best.org).

Teachers leave the training workshop with the following resources:

- A manual with 11 lessons for Year 1 and 3 booster lessons for Year 2
- Eight interactive student videos
- Twelve full-color classroom posters
- Demonstration videos of key activities and teaching strategies
- An overview video for colleagues and community members

Project ALERT periodically updates and distributes curricula, videos, posters, and other information to trained teachers free of charge.

Technical assistance is provided through an online faculty advisor, toll-free telephone support, and newsletters. A fidelity instrument is available to monitor implementation quality.

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In the early 1980s, the RAND Corporation, an internationally recognized nonprofit institution established to improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis, assessed the effectiveness of three major strategies for curtailing adolescent drug use: prevention, law enforcement, and treatment. Based on that study's conclusions, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation funded RAND to develop and test Project ALERT between 1983 and 1993.

National dissemination of the program, underwritten by the Hilton Foundation, began in 1991. Project ALERT has a presence in all 50 States. More than 18,000 teachers in approximately 3,500 school districts use Project ALERT in their classrooms. RAND is now developing and testing an enhanced version of Project ALERT that is designed for high schools.

## EVALUATION DESIGN

Project ALERT used a rigorous pre-post design with random assignment of 30 schools to one control and two treatment conditions (i.e., an adult teacher group and an adult teacher plus teen leader group). The participating schools had diverse student bodies. Nine schools had a minority population of 50 percent or more.

Trained data collectors administered student surveys in all schools before and after program lessons. Self-reported drug use was validated by testing saliva samples collected from students and by consistency analyses over time. Logistic regression was used to analyze substance use outcomes as a function of treatment and baseline covariates. Multiple controls helped rule out alternative explanations of treatment effects. All analyses were adjusted for attrition and clustering of students within schools.

## Target Areas

### Protective Factors To Increase

#### Individual

- Reasons not to use drugs
- Perceptions that few peers use, most disapprove
- Belief that one can resist prodrug pressures
- Intentions not to use
- Belief that friends respect nonusers
- Ability to identify and counter advertising appeals
- Multiple strategies for resisting drugs
- Ability to identify and resist internal pressures to use

#### Peer

- Motivation and skills to help friends avoid drug use
- Responsible behavior modeled by peers

#### Family

- Communication with parents and other adults

#### School

- Establishment of norms against drug use
- Cooperative learning
- Respect for others

### Risk Factors To Decrease

#### Individual

- Current use of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs
- Intention to use in the future
- Belief that drug use is not harmful or has positive effects
- Belief that drug use is normal
- Low self-esteem
- Inadequate resistance skills

#### Peer

- Peer drug use
- Peer approval of drugs

#### School

- High levels of drug use
- Low norms against use

#### Family

- Lack of clear norms against use
- Poor communication

## PROGRAM DEVELOPER

### **Phyllis Ellickson, Ph.D.**

Dr. Phyllis Ellickson and colleagues at RAND developed and evaluated Project ALERT. This program has its own dissemination organization, established by the Hilton Foundation, to train teachers in effective implementation of the program, provide technical assistance, and periodically update classroom materials. Project ALERT is subsidized by ongoing funding from the Hilton Foundation.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For information on teacher training, curriculum materials, technical assistance, and cost, contact:

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## RECOGNITION

Model Program—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Exemplary Program—U.S. Department of Education

Exemplary Program—White House Office of National Drug Control Policy

Exemplary Program—National Prevention Network

Exemplary Program—National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors

Exemplary Program—Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America

Endorsed by the National Middle School Association